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**Making E-mail Interesting**

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**Problem Statement**

To gamify the email experience, making the process easier, more efficient, and overall entertaining for the average user.

**Preliminary Interviews and Data Collection**

We conducted two separate interview session with 5 people in each session. The questions asked during the interviews sections varied, but all the data we gathered went towards the final game.

**Interview Session 1**

List of Questions Asked:

Before the interviews, my partner and I decided to ask questions centered around two main areas of interest: *what their experience with e –mail is like*, and *what in their lives gives them enjoyment and pleasure*. Included in the first area of interest was asking what a daily experience with e-mail is like, what they dislike about using e-mail for work or leisure, what they enjoy about e-mail, and how they utilize or customize e-mail to attempt to fit their needs. We asked broader questions about their daily activities outside of e-mail usage to attempt to discover overarching “character traits” that could be later extrapolated to apply to a character type. Below are the two groups, and the questions we asked that fell under each broad group.

*What is your experience with email?*

· How you feel about answering e-mails?

· What kinds of e-mails do you get on a daily basis?

· How many e-mails do you get on a daily basis?

· Is e-mail your primary means of communication?

· How many e-mail accounts do you have? How many do you use?

· Do you view e-mail (answering, receiving) as a chore?

· Do you block out a time to answer e-mail, or do you answer them as they are received?

· How do you deal with “junk” mail or spam e-mail?

· Do you have a system of organizing e-mails?

· Do you use a mobile device?

· Do you prioritize your e-mail?

· Have you thought of any ways that would improve your experience with e-mail?

*What do you enjoy in life—what do you do that gives you enjoyment or pleasure?*

· What do you enjoy in life?

· What makes you happy, or makes you feel alive?

· What do you watch/view/listen to for entertainment?

· Do you play any games?

Range of Responses:

Our interviews were able to give the perspective on a wide variety of e-mail users on campus. We interviewed a student who was involved in many clubs and organizations, two reference librarians, a career counselor, and the assistant registrar. All of these interviewees noted that e-mail was a significant part of their daily school or work routine, and all interviewees also used e-mail for personal communication, and had multiple e-mail accounts.

One of the most significant differences in responses was the openness or enjoyment out of receiving multimedia within their e-mails (for sending or receiving). Jerry Houser, the career counselor, and Lauren Branch, a student, both viewed multimedia in e-mail as having a potential to be very helpful and grab the attention of the recipients of e-mail. Gary Klein, a reference librarian, and Sarah Battin, the assistant registrar, both stated that multimedia would be distracting. I speculate that the responses on these opposite ends of the spectrum may be attributed to the amount of e-mails that are received on a daily basis (someone who receives more e-mails per day would be less likely to find multimedia helpful, as it takes up more time), and the necessity for the sender to grab the attention of a large audience (individuals who use e-mail to grab the attention of the viewer tend to enjoy using multimedia when sending e-mails).

Another interesting range of responses was whether or not our interviewees enjoyed using (or wanted to start using) mobile devices to check or send e-mails. Most of our interviewees currently use (or want to use) mobile devices like a smart phone or tablet PC to check e-mail. However, several interviewees noted that, although they enjoyed checking e-mail on their mobile device, they were less likely to respond or reply to it right away while on the mobile device. I imagine that this is attributed to the facts that it is more difficult to type an e-mail on a device with no keyboard, or very small or touch-screen buttons, and that typically, one’s attention is not dedicated to the subject matter of an e-mail if they are checking it on a mobile device. One interviewee, Gary Klein, did not have an interest in using a mobile device to check e-mail. He had no interest in being “connected” to the internet or his work at all times of the day, and had no interest in social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter. I understand Gary’s response to be somewhat typical of an older generation, who view the separation of work and play as nearly sacred, which can be seen in Gary’s discomfort in responding to our questions about what he enjoys to do in his spare time, and what makes him happy.

All of our interviewees had a way of organizing their e-mail, aside from the inbox/sent/trash folders that automatically sort e-mail. Most individuals created labeled folders for their work or school related e-mails, and those that did not use folders stated that they had a system in their head of mentally sorting e-mails to decide which needed to be responded to immediately, and which ones could be dealt with later. All of our interviewees stated that they do not receive much spam e-mail (e-mail that they did not subscribe to or sign up for), but that they did receive many e-mails that were not work related, such as Groupon or Google Offers, that they enjoyed browsing when they had time, but did not often respond to.

When asked about their hobbies and interest, most interviewees cited certain genres of movies, books, or television shows as what they were interested in. A few cited their family, kids, or pets. Most of our interviewees stated that they did not play many games, but enjoyed playing fairly non-competitive or solitary games, such as crossword puzzles, or single-player Facebook games online.

Lastly, I was surprised that most of our interviewees did not view answering or sending e-mail as a chore. Nearly all of them did not have many strong feelings about e-mail. It was simply a tool that they used to communicate with others for work and, to an extent, for leisure. Those who did have strong feelings about e-mail tended to think of e-mail as very positive, citing the ability to include multimedia and reach a large audience very quickly as some of the best and most helpful aspects of e-mail. Jerry Houser, the career counselor, noted that he was constantly trying to find out better ways to connect with the staff and student body of Willamette University. He noted that it was often difficult to grab the attention of the recipients of his e-mails because they receive so many e-mails on a daily basis that his are not deemed “important” enough to elicit a response.

**Interview Session 2**

Questions asked during Interviews:

· How many emails do you get on average everyday? How many work related?

· How quickly do you respond to emails?

· What are your motivations to respond to email quickly?

· How do you organize your emails?

· What are your main hobbies?

· What’s your favorite thing about email? Do you on average enjoy emailing, or would you prefer a different form of communication?

· What do you dislike about email?

· What games do you like to play? Strategy, competition, puzzle, recreation?

· Anything else…. For several interviews, more information was shared at the end, or the questions were asked in different orders.

Speculations:

There were a wide variety of responses, often contradictory to each other. What one person enjoyed about email, another disliked. Most of the interviewees appreciated the ease of using email, but several disliked that it replaced face-to-face interactions. The younger people we interviewed, such as students, didn’t mind the lack of direct interaction with people, while adults felt that email was detrimentally replacing that aspect of business. This was one interesting generational difference we noticed.

The type of games people played was also varied greatly. Some hated competition and strategy game, instead enjoying the relaxing games to connect with family and friends. Alternately, some people enjoyed the strategy and competitive games, like chess. This definitely strikes a divide in our potential customer personas, as what some people enjoy others actively dislike. This is something to consider when creating each consumer profile.

Some questions were more productive than others. In particular, the questions about what they like and dislike about email were effective in gathering ways to improve the system. Alternately, questions about hobbies were less helpful, as the people we interviewed said such different things, it made it difficult to draw them all together. This did add some interesting quotes when creating character profiles though.

We wanted to interview a variety of people, instead of similar personalities. This helped vary the responses we got. They were all people on the Willamette campus, but by trying to get different personalities it allowed us to get varied responses and a wider view of the market.



**Jo Reeder: (Student Manager at the Bistro)**

Jo, an Exercise Science major who enjoys medicine, health, and music, gets on average 40 - 50 emails a day and usually responds to the emails as soon as she receives them, although she occasionally needs a reminder to do so. Her motivation to respond to the emails comes from her fear of forgetting to reply and ‘blowing people off’. However, sometimes an email does not need an immediate response depending on her emotional reaction at the time of reading. She does try her very best, though, to respond to the email within a day to ensure quick and effective communication. Jo dislikes vague responses in her emails as they end up creating a need for more emails back and forth. Short emails are preferred, although some require lengthy responses.

Jo enjoys using email for business purposes. She can take her time to respond the way she deems fit, and it is usually a quick and easy form of communication between coworkers. Jo loves the interconnectivity with Google products and Gmail, and likes that the system is integrated and gives her the ability to archive her emails indefinitely. Overall, Jo likes getting rid of her unread emails and finds herself bored when there are no more emails for her to read or respond to. The games that Jo likes to play include Solitaire, Mario games, Sport games, and pretty much any game with a competitive component and strategy.



**Micheal Seraphin: (Residential Services)**

Receiving about 40-45 emails a day, Micheal Seraphin finds email a pain. The only time Micheal enjoys sending emails is when it is quick and easy to respond or send. Motivation to send an email depends on a few categories: Who it is from, the topic of the email, the scope of the project, and the time sensitivity of the email. Although usually immediately responsive to emails, he will leave an email and come back to it if it involved a heated exchange to avoid mistakes. Furthermore, if he is starting a new project, it may take awhile to send an email to the appropriate people to begin the conversation. Micheal dislikes lengthy emails that include backstory and unnecessary information, as they waste his time. For email platforms, Micheal uses Thunderbird because it is simple, not busy, and easy to use and understand. Overall, Micheal rarely prefers sending emails to other forms of communication such as phone. In fact, Micheal would rather call than email, as it is faster and more direct. Talking in person is more enjoyable for him as well.

His hobbies include wine, tennis, reading, keeping up on current events and financial news. His favorite games include Monopoly, Risk, Scattegories, trivial pursuit and general thinking and strategic games. He prefers games that have a winner in the end, but he is ok not winning.



**Amy Shwartz: (Administrative Assistant, Art Department)**

Amy typically uses Gmail and doesn’t like the Google calendar system. She generally receives about 20 emails a day for work, while she gets fewer personal emails. Her spam filter limits the amount she gets per day. Facebook messages are a better way to reach her than email for personal interactions. She always has her email open on her computer and she uses it to communicate over other forms of communication. Email is reliable and the group email possibilities are very helpful in the workplace. She always uses full sentences in her emails, whether they are short or long. When she answers her emails she starts with throwing away emails that are junk, and then moves on to responding to quick emails. She then sorts the important ones to keep. She likes the email chains, which allow you to see the entire conversation. The bold aspects of unread emails are also helpful.

Her hobbies include exercising at home with her laptop, Art, design and movies. She enjoys solitaire, chess, backgammon, cards and Yahtzee. She likes interactive games, and the relaxation and social aspect of games. Additionally, competition is fun for her. Overall, she enjoys email, and likes the filtering systems. For her, emails are efficient and have greatly helped with her writing skills.



**Lisa Holliday (Associate Dean of Campus Life and Director of Student Activities)**

Lisa generally receives 50 to 75 emails a day for work. Additionally, she receives 20 personal emails per day as well. She has 3 email accounts, so she had to check each one individually. She throws away a lot of emails. She doesn’t read the junk mail she gets, but responds to important emails right away. If it’s an emotional response, she waits and responds later. She constantly scans emails for reminders, and keeps her inbox small by utilizing folders. She appreciates the ease and efficiency of email, but dislikes aggression in email. She dislikes misuse of email and the fact that its replaced face to face interaction because of this, she prefers the using the phone over email.

Games she plays include games with her kids, like Ratatat Cat, which is a card game, and the board game Trouble. She likes the social aspect of games, and family bonding, but dislikes competition and strategy. Her hobbies include cooking, sports and volunteering with sororities and her kids school programs. Additionally, she likes the correct grammar and spelling in emails, and would like a better way to search and organize her email.



**Barbie Noyes: (CLA Student)**

Barbie generally receives 20 to 30 emails per day. 20 of them are typically person, while 10 are work or job related. She tries to respond promptly, but sometimes forgets and sends it later. She tries not to do that, but it happens. If it’s an important issue or if a polite and concise reply necessary, she tries to respond quickly. She also throws away all emails that are old or unimportant. She tries to keep all the important emails in folders, but junk emails are thrown away. The things she likes about email are that they are easy to organize and the easy ability to respond quickly to people. She likes the easy aspect of emails, which means you don’t have to call people as much. She dislikes rude or aggressive emails, or too much junk mail. If there is a lack of greeting or courtesy in emails she also dislikes that.

Her hobbies include playing the piano, baking, exercising, movies and good TV shows. Her favorite games involve strategy and some competition. Games like LIFE or monopoly fall into this category. She also likes phone games. She likes some video games, such as role-playing video games, that involve missions and adventures. Additionally, she doesn’t really like checking email so much, as it can be stressful, but its necessary.

**Data Organization**



We utilized the Stanford method, using post-it notes to organize the data gathered during our interviews. We took quotes and main ideas from the interviews and grouped them according to topic and similarity. Which original interviewee the quotes belong to was unimportant, as we focused on similar ideas. Once grouped, we extracted main ideas and themes from the quotes and points, which allowed us to come up with composite characters and a target market. Each character has a need, and we attempted to fulfill it.

**Target Audience**

**Composite Character: Sue**



Sue is a working mom in her 40s. She is extremely family oriented, but also has a busy job. She is not particularly tech savvy, but needs email for her everyday tasks, both at the office and at home. Organizing school functions and keeping up with her kids’ busy schedules is a hard job, and she needs to be very organized. She wants to make a good impression and is worried about others opinions. She plays games regularly with her family, which are geared for her children. This is a form of family bonding for them. Typical games they enjoy are Monopoly, Sorry, Trouble and Ratatat Cat, which is a card game. Competition and winning is not important to Sue, as her gaming is more about spending time with the important people in her life. Overall, she needs a way to stay organized and allow her to spend more time with her family. She also needs an easy to use email system, which is easily customizable for her individual needs.

**Composite Character: Steven**



We decided to target Steven, a workingman in his late 20s. Steven works in a large company, and has to collaborate with many different people from many different inter-office departments on a daily and weekly basis. Steven receives over 100 emails per day, and often finds it hard to keep up with emails because of this extremely high volume of communications. Although he uses his own system to keep track of emails, some conversations can get lost in the disorganization of his inbox, and he occasionally has trouble prioritizing emails based on how quickly the response is required. Steven lacks incentive to check and work on emails during his office hours and when at home. He responds to most emails on time, but often finds office communication boring and repetitive. After work, Steven enjoys casual gaming, especially games that involve competition--competition in particular makes his life more interesting. Steven keeps up to date on current technologies, including smartphones, tablets, and personal computers. Steven is quite social, and has many hobbies when not working that keep him busy. Steven enjoys having simplicity in his life, but does not enjoy repetitiveness.

**Brainstorming Solutions**

Our “How Might We” questions involved making the email process easier, less repetitive, and boring for office workers like Steven. In particular, we tried to ask questions that targeted how to create an environment, how to provide incentives, and how to eliminate boredom and frustration with email software and answering emails.

1. How might we provide incentives for Steven to get his work done quicker?
2. How might we create an environment to promote productivity without being distracting and making sure it is age appropriate?
3. How might we gamify the email process so that the repeated actions of sending & receiving email is enticing?
4. How might we inspire Steven to answer emails quickly but accurately?
5. How might we incentivize Steven to not delay responses to emails whenever possible?
6. How might we allow Steven to maintain his freedom at work, while still having him use the system we create?
7. How might we simplify the email process?

After we created our “How Might We” questions, we created ideas that we thought could combat the problems we identified with email and work environments.

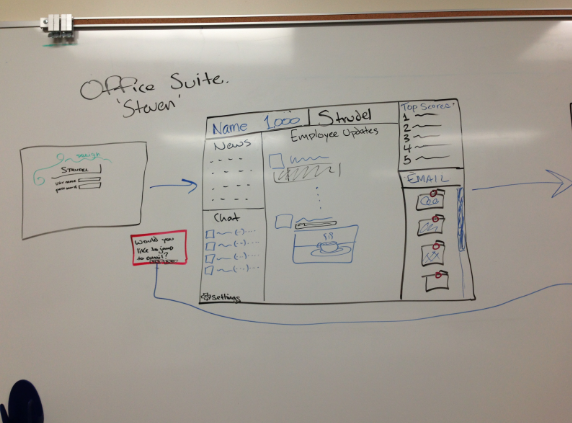
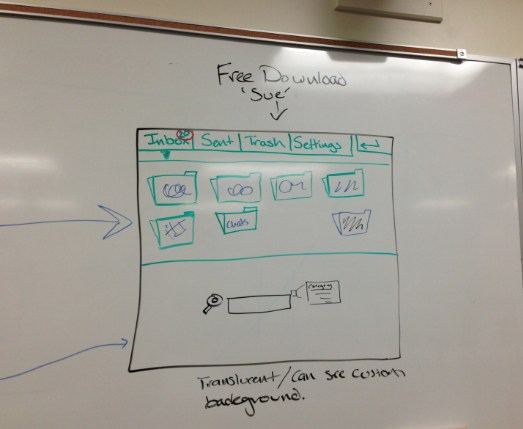
* Social-networking site that integrates incentives (rewards) with email. Perhaps link it to already-existing social media or social networking sites.
  + Targets HMW questions #1, #2, and #6.
* Themed email software that directly relates to the individual’s interests, with customized rewards related to that theme. Every certain number of emails that the user responds to or sends gives the player “experience,” which adds up to both receiving incentives, and smaller victories.
  + Example: Basketball-themed email software that gives the individual basketball-related rewards for completing and sending emails. Smaller victories could include allowing the player to see the current score of a basketball game going on.
  + Targets HMW questions #1, #2, #3, and #4; however, it violates #6 because the software would necessarily have to disallow the user from viewing the current score on a basketball game whenever they wanted if a reward after sending and receiving email was to view the score.
* Integration with Groupon or Google Offers. When the player sends a certain number of emails, they gain points that translate to dollar amounts that can be applied to Groupon or Google Offers deals.
  + Targets HMW questions #1, #3, and #6.
* Automatic sorting of emails into folders, based on importance, category, by sender, subject, or tags. The program will “learn” how to sort emails based on how the user “tags” each email in a certain period of time.
  + Targets HMW questions #2, #4, #5, #6, and #7.
* Weighted “points” system for a rewards program.
  + Targets HMW questions #1, #3, and #4.
* Visually enhanced software for an email client to simplify it and make it more welcoming.
  + Targets HMW questions #2, and #7.
* Fantasy story integration--when the player reaches certain “checkpoints” in the experience they gain by answering and sending e-mails, they receive another segment of a story as a reward.
  + Targets HMW questions #1 and #3.
* Access to an online community that the individual can only access after they gain a certain amount of experience. The community would be a game in itself, and the player would only be able to access it outside of work. The game community would have a prize catalogue as an incentive.
  + Targets HMW questions #1, #2, #3, and #6.

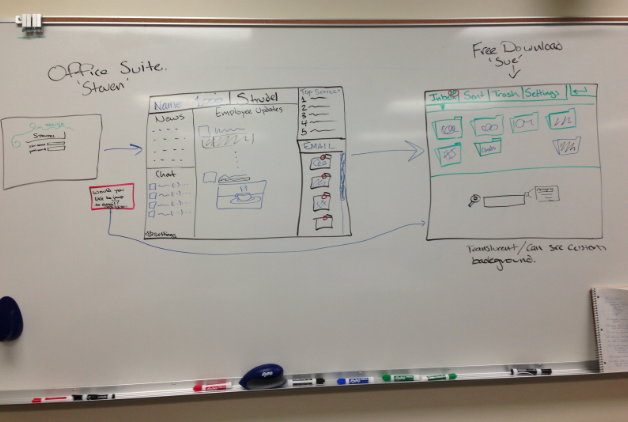
We classified our ideas as “Most Likely to Succeed,” “Most Likely to Delight,” and “Most Breakthrough.” In order for an idea to qualify as “Most Likely to Succeed,” the idea must both have the capacity to be implemented using the technology available today and will properly address the problem at hand. “Most Breakthrough” refers to ideas that would be incredibly successful at addressing the problem at hand, but do not require the proper technologies to be easily accessible in order to create the design. “Most Likely to Delight” refers to the ideas that are the most likely to be fun and enticing to the player.

* Most Likely to Succeed:
  + Email system that increases productivity, and lessens users dislike of email.
* Most Likely to Delight:
  + Social networking site that allows individuals to communicate with each other in a multitude of ways (by e-mail, instant messaging, Skype, or voice chat).
  + Game that is utilized by enough people (businesses) to increase competitiveness between users with the high score boards.
  + Receiving rewards and or compensation for achieving the highest overall score for the week.
* Most Breakthrough:
  + Fully customizable email interface for each person (the ability to directly provide incentives and rewards that they are certain to want and use).
  + Easy to understand and utilize and limits IT help necessary
  + Integrates easily with everyday business activities.

**Initial Concept**

Our initial concept to make email interesting and engaging for Steven was an email platform integrated within a social media site. Here are photos of our initial design, done using a whiteboard. This allowed for quick revision and easy prototypes. We used arrows to indicate where clicking would take the user to the next page. For example, if someone clicked on a folder icon, it would open the folder, and show the emails inside. This is illustrated below.





**Secondary Interviews with Prototype**

For our prototype test session we our game and website mock-ups with three of the individuals we interviewed earlier in the semester. Lisa Holliday, Amy Schwartz and Jo Reeder all looked at the prototypes as we walked them through the website prototype. When interviewing each person we asked the following questions:

What’s your favorite aspect of the system?

What’s your least favorite part?

How do you think the point system works?

What would you change about the point system if you could?

Is anything distracting?

What color scheme would you like to see?

Do you think it would build community within an office?

Would you choose this system for your office?

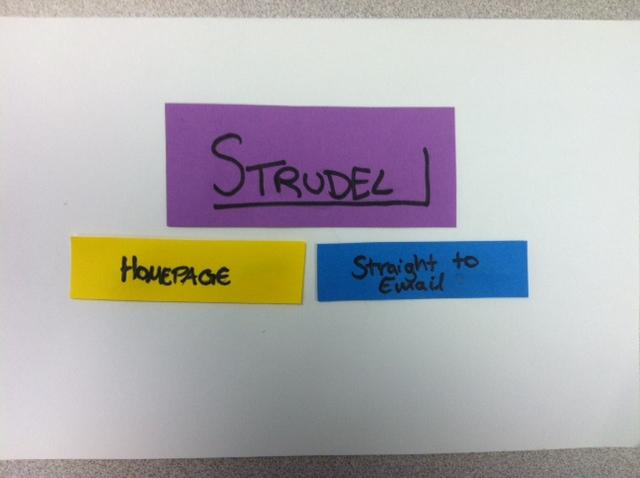
Lisa suggested we rework the points system to include less competition. She thought it would intimidate new members of the office, or could cause unnecessary stress within the office culture. By having office members compete, it makes the environment tenser. She suggested we make the points more internal, so each member can monitor their own points and get rewards for their productivity. She also thought the posting system and inter-office chat system was helpful, as it promoted office community. It keeps people internally working, instead of going to facebook or other social networking systems. Additionally, with the social network aspect of Strudel, everything is work related, or about the office, which makes it more useful than facebook in an office setting. Because email and connecting with people in the office is one place, it lessens procrastination.

When interviewing Amy, her first suggestion was to make the system less cluttered and use softer colors. She suggested a more professional layout and color selection. Additionally, she liked the connection of social media and email. This eliminates some of procrastination in the office, as everything is one place. The automatic filing system into folders makes life easier in the office and she enjoyed the fact that you can preference your mode of communication. She liked the competition aspect of the point system, but agreed that internalizing the points and rewards could be an improvement. Also, accumulating points and working towards an office reward could build more office community.

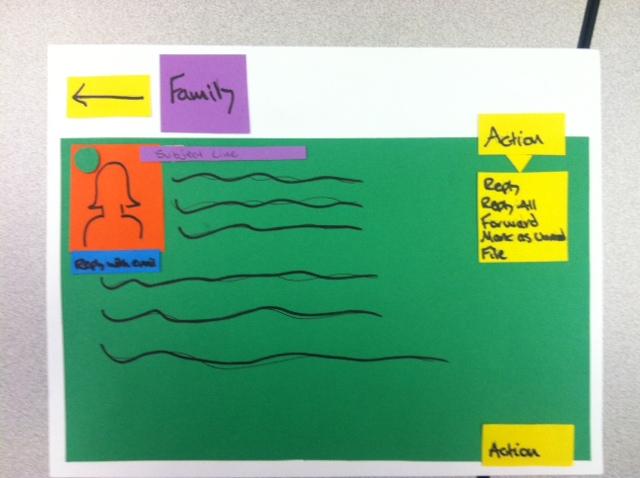
Jo suggested that we make multiple “versions” of the interface (one for managers and one for employees so that executives can monitor productivity). She really liked the social media homepage, and the integration with email. She thought that it would be great for employees to have a space to interact with each other and communicate quickly and efficiently, while also maintaining a professional office atmosphere. She also enjoyed the additions of weather, sports, and news sections to allow employees to take a break from work without distracting themselves by leaving the company page.

After the interviews, we decided to look into restructuring the point system of the website. We combine the recommendations from Lisa and Jo and ended up creating a point reward system where only the individual can see their own score. This will reduce intercommunity competition and reward individual behavior. Individual points can then be spent in the online reward store, where the points act as currency towards certain prizes available. Once purchased, the prizes will be displayed on the homepage where the rest of the employees can view each other’s rewards. Furthermore, the total points gathered by the business will be displayed at the top of the homepage. This collective score will go towards a collective reward. If the entire business reaches a certain goal, everyone is rewarded with discounts on a night out, discounts at the company store, or a similar prize. We will also include a version of the system exclusively for management. This version will display the individual points of each employee. This way the managers can monitor the productivity of their employees and ensure a productive work environment or fix any issues that present themselves.

Our next steps in this process will be to develop a secondary prototype that includes all of the suggestions given by our interviews. We will also develop a concrete point and reward system for testers to work with and give feedback on.



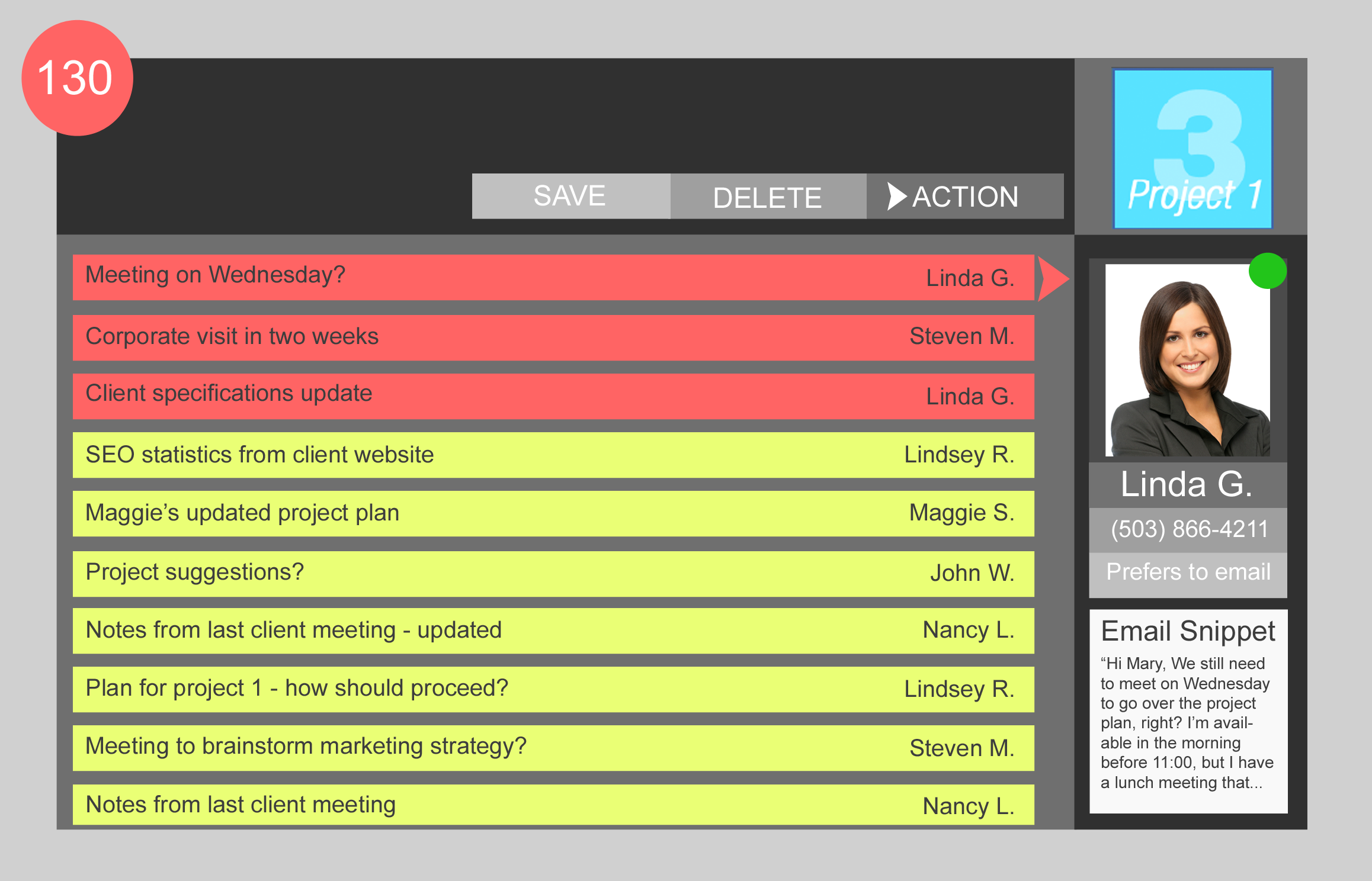
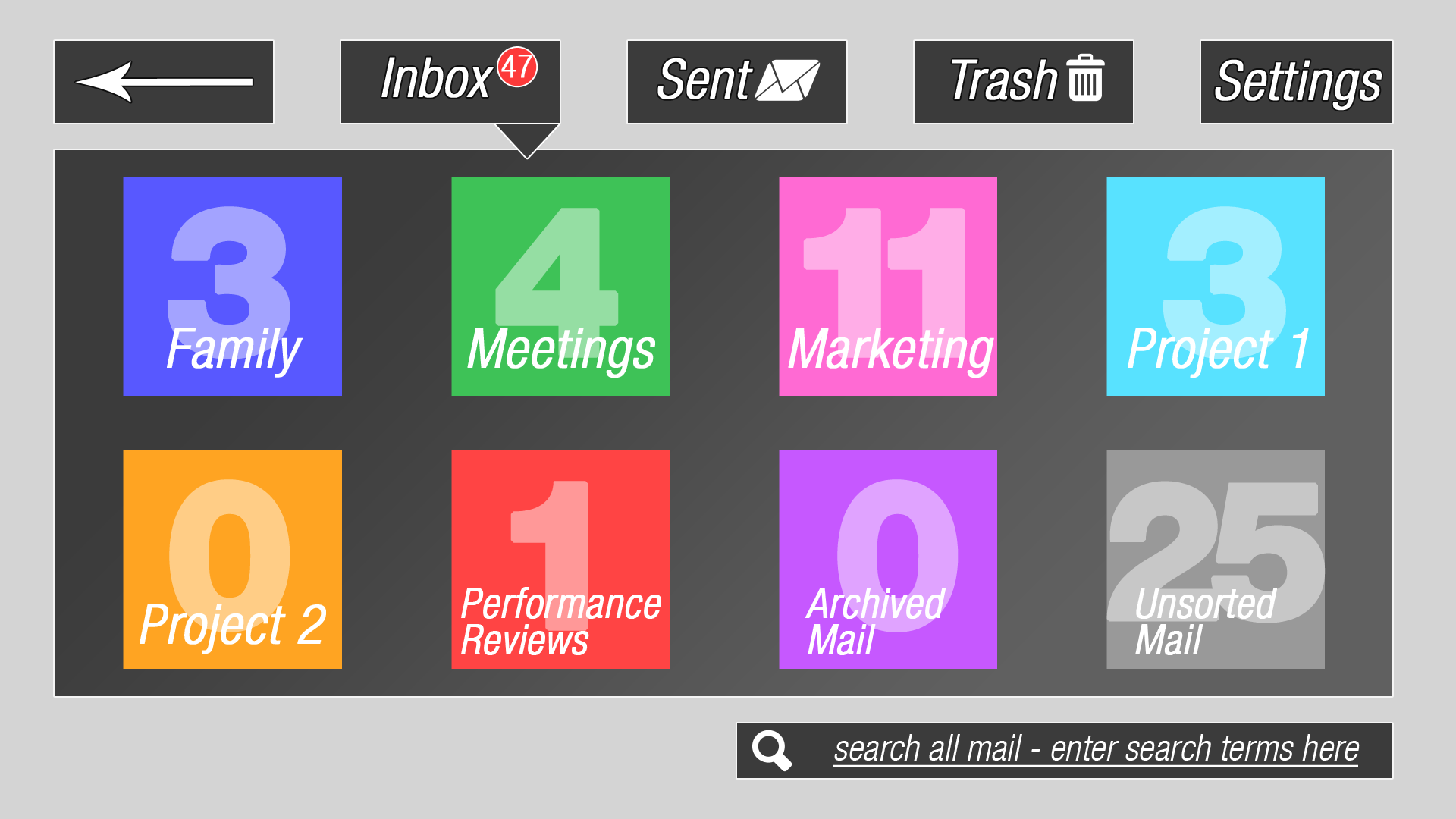
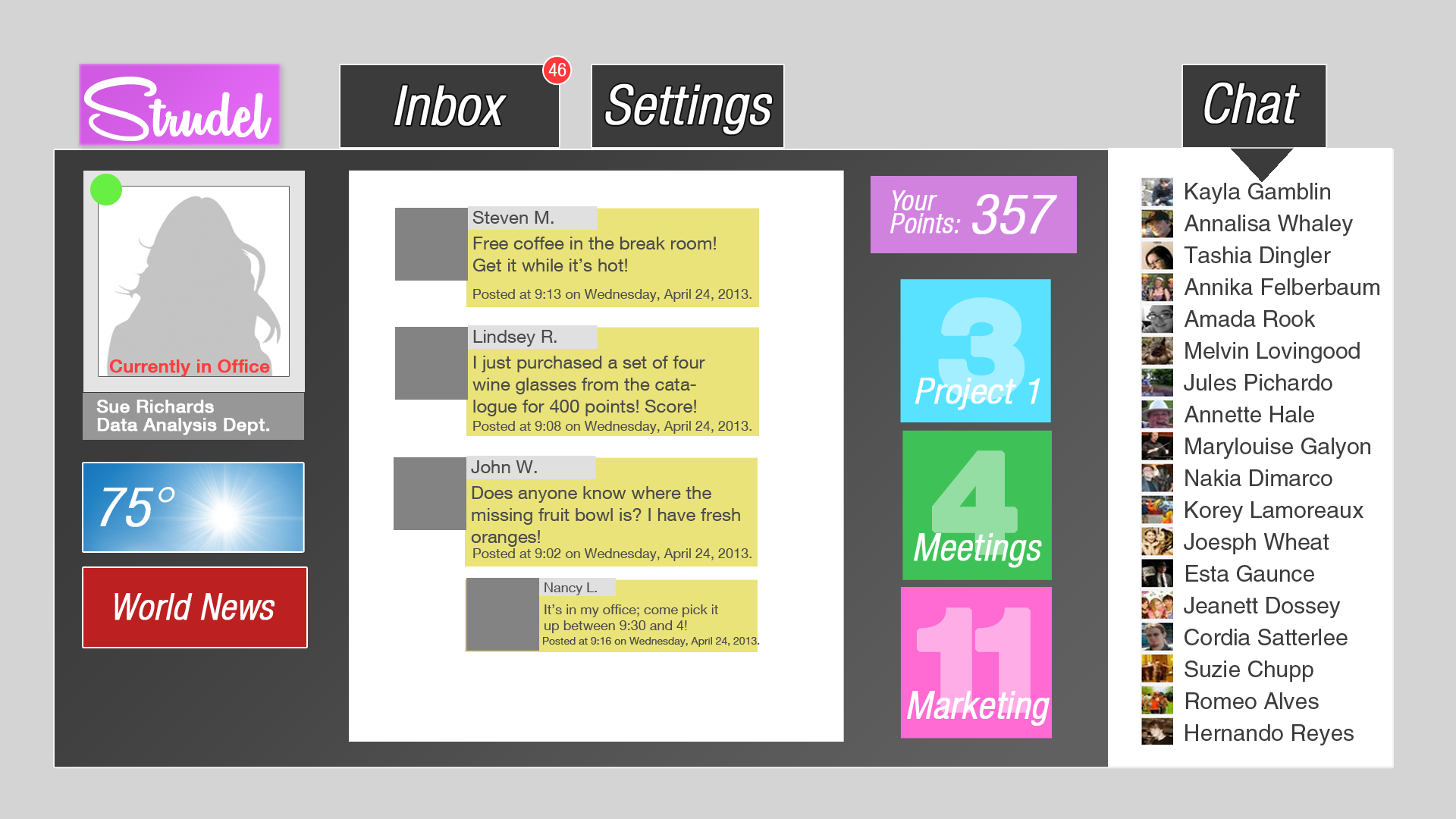
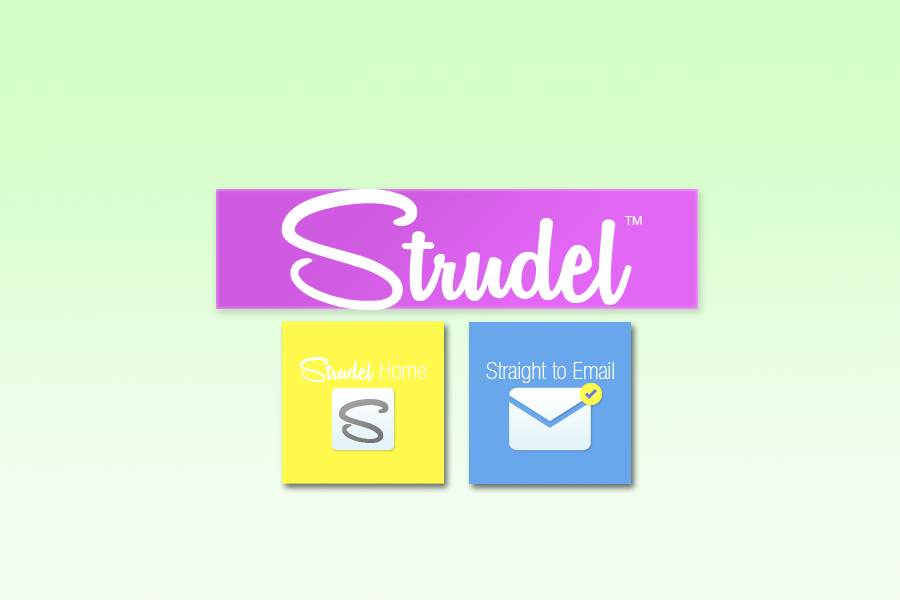




**Final Game Overview**

Our final game is a social media, game system that can be sold to businesses for use in offices. It utilizes a points system, where users have a profile and earn points for sending emails and being productive at work. These points are then redeemable for real-world rewards, in the form discounts or free items at local restaurants or stores. Additionally, offices can work towards communal rewards, with the entire office earning real-world prizes for increased office productivity. The social media system includes a profile of the user, with information about their office and email preferences. Users can post comments on the system, which can build community bonding.







**Solution to the Problem**

Strudel offers a solution to offices across the world that are searching for a way to gamify the email experience. Strudel, through its integration of social media, an email platform and a reward structure for completing email related tasks, promotes a strong and positive office community and environment. It furthermore eases communication between coworkers, making office communication more efficient and effective. With the reward system in place, rewarding individuals for their prompt actions regarding an incoming email, Strudel incentivizes individual productivity and motivates work. In order to avoid unnecessary office conflict, only the individual can see his or her own points. However, they do have access to the collective number of points earned by the office, allowing the individual to see where they stand among their peers within the office. Every quarter, the total office points will go towards a collective prize determined by the managerial staff. This further promotes office unity and benefits the office environment, as the employees work together to reach a collective goal. In addition, individual points can be spent at the end of each quarter on designated rewards. These individual prizes can be selected on the catalogue, unique to each business. The prizes can range from discounts in the business store, coupons at the nearby bar, or a discount at a partnered business.

Strudel also allows management staff to monitor and ensure overall office productivity through easy-to-access charts and analytics. Management can view how employees have followed up to incoming e-mails, whether they preferred to reply through Strudel, make in-person meetings on the included calendar, or make a phone call. These statistics will allow the managerial staff more insight into how their employees prefer to communicate. Although this managerial version of Strudel can be used to monitor appropriate use of the software, managers are encouraged to only view these statistics during necessary review periods for employees, instead of using it to instill fear as a motivator in employees. Furthermore, Strudel’s managerial view allows managerial staff to track what products or services are most popular in the rewards catalogue.